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A Profile of Migrant Nurses in Ireland. Nurse Migration Project Policy Brief 4

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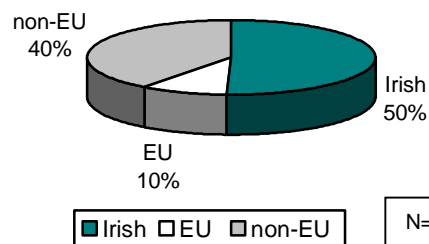
Background to the Nurse Migration Project

‘Health systems maintain the life of a country, and the people who work in them are its life blood’ [1].

Migrant nurses, mainly from outside of the EU, are now an essential component of the Irish nursing workforce. This is the result of almost a decade of active overseas nurse recruitment from countries such as India and the Philippines. Between 2000 and 2008, non-EU migrant nurses accounted for 40% of nurses newly registered with the Irish Nursing Board [2] (see Fig. 1). According to the INO, *“It is a reality, not readily acknowledged by Irish health employers, that this country would now be forced to close literally thousands of beds”*q[3] without the presence of migrant nurses in the health system.

Despite this reliance, there is little information available about Ireland’s migrant nurse workforce. Some quite basic questions remain unanswered including: How many migrant nurses currently work in Ireland? In what fields of nursing and at what grades do they work? How many are women and how many men? What ages are they? What skills and experience did they bring to Ireland and are these being well utilised? Do they have children, either in Ireland or in their home country? Are they satisfied working and living in Ireland? And . of crucial importance . do they intend to stay here? The RCSI nurse migration project is beginning to fill these information gaps, through qualitative and quantitative surveys of migrant nurses in Ireland. This policy brief is the third on emerging project findings.

Figure 1: Nationality of Nurses Newly Registered in Ireland 2000-2008 [2]



‘At present the whole family are satisfied and somewhat settled. It’s just the recession that worries me. But generally speaking we are happy living and working in Ireland’ (Respondent 108)

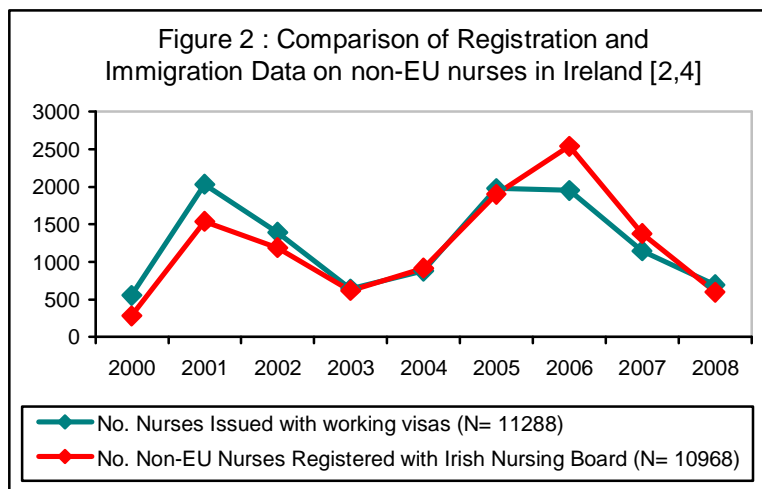
Data Presented

This policy brief presents the results of a recent survey of 337 migrant nurses in Ireland, undertaken between February and July 2009 by the Nurse Migration Project, RCSI. On behalf of the research team, the Irish Nursing Board forwarded self-completion postal questionnaires to a random sample of 1536 non-EU nurses on the Nursing Register. The postal survey achieved a response rate of 20% and a sample size of 309. A parallel sampling strategy to recruit respondents from 3 Dublin hospitals resulted in the recruitment of a further 28 respondents. The final quantitative data (N=337) were analysed using SPSS statistical software. This policy brief also presents nurse registration data from the Irish Nursing Board [2] and working visa data from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment [4].

‘I love working and staying here in Ireland, I’m very happy with my job and life here in Ireland. We just need security for myself and my family, applying for citizenship here in Ireland takes too much time and you don’t know the result. At the moment, citizenship is our main concern’ (Respondent 283)

Available Data on Nurse Migration to Ireland

Between 2000 and 2008, 10,968 non-EU nurses from 75 different countries newly registered with the Irish Nursing Board [2]. Most of these nurses (87%) were from India or the Philippines, two countries which were the focus of Ireland's international recruitment campaigns. During the same time period, 11,288 non-EU nurses were issued with working visas [4] (see Fig. 2).



Data Deficiencies

- Although useful, the immigration and registration data record only the *arrival* of migrant nurses to Ireland between 2000 and 2008.
- Minimal data are available to track the subsequent progress of migrant nurses through the Irish health system or to indicate whether they have re-migrated onwards to another country.
- Although workforce projections indicate that Ireland will continue to rely on overseas recruitment to staff its health system [5] little or nothing is known about Ireland's migrant nurse population beyond their year of arrival and country of origin.

Profile of Respondent Migrant Nurses

The following sections profile the 337 migrant nurses who participated in our survey in early 2009. It provides demographic and employment data [6] that, if available on all migrant nurses, would enable workforce planners to incorporate the migrant nurse workforce into health workforce planning projections.

- **85% (287) of respondent migrant nurses were women.**
- Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 63, with **an average age of 38.**
- **77% (261) of respondents were married** and of those, the majority 73% (247) lived with their spouse in Ireland.
- **15% (52) of respondents were single.**
- **68% (230) of respondents had children.**
- **51% (173) of respondents were from the Philippines, 33% (112) from India.** The remaining respondents came from one of 16 other countries.
- Although 42% (143) of respondents had have been in Ireland for seven years or longer, **only 23 respondents had obtained Irish citizenship.**

'Compared to my previous country . . . [Middle Eastern Country] . . . Ireland . . . [is] . . . more accommodating and fair to their foreign workers and I can practice freely my religion but on the other side of the coin, Ireland still not ready to host her foreign workers in relation to migration/long term residency or naturalisation'
(Respondent 52).

Pre-Migration Nursing Experience, Skills and Qualifications

'I was working more skilfully in India, like starting IV, more advanced procedures, but here I am not covered for such things and I am not in touch with these procedures. I may lose skills over a time'
(Respondent 104)

- **56% (189) of respondents had previously worked as a nurse in India or the Philippines and 25% (85) came to work in Ireland from the Middle East.**
 - Before coming to Ireland, **39% (130) of respondents had 6-10 years nursing experience.** 31% (105) of respondents had up to five years nursing experience. 13% (45) had over 16 years of nursing experience.
 - **70% (238) of respondents held Nursing Degrees** and 15% (52) held Higher Diploma and/or Masters Degrees.
 - 49% (164) of respondents had previously worked as staff nurses or midwives, **28% (96) had worked as senior staff nurses or midwives and 11% (36) had held nurse/midwife manager posts.** 4% (15) of respondents had worked as lecturers prior to their migration.
- Many respondents 38% (130) had worked in a range of nursing fields prior to coming to Ireland, 16% (53) had specialised in intensive care and 14% (46) had specialised in surgery.
 - In terms of migration plans on arrival, 34% (116) of respondents came to Ireland unsure of how long they intended to stay, 15% (51) intended to stay for less than 2 years, 18% (62) for 2-5 years and 15% (50) stated that when they came to Ireland, they had intended to stay for 5-10 years.

Experiences of Nursing in Ireland

- **62% (208) of respondents worked in a public hospital upon arrival.** 21% (71) began their Irish nursing careers in a private nursing home.
- **69% (233) of respondents felt that their first job in Ireland was a good match to their experience and qualifications,** but 30% (101) felt that their first post was a poor or very poor match.
- For **29% (98) of respondents, their first nursing post in Ireland was in Geriatrics** despite the fact that many non-EU nurses had no prior experience of Geriatric nursing *'nothing prepared me for the actual work as we don't have geriatrics back home'* (Respondent 260). 15% (52) of respondents began working in Surgery on arrival to Ireland and a further 10% (34) began in Intensive Care.
- **66% (233) of respondents are still working in the same job.** Of the 117 respondents who had moved jobs, 64% (75) had stayed less than 2 years in their first job.
- At the time of the survey, **80% (269) of respondents held permanent contracts** and 16% (54) held contracts of between 1 and 2 years in duration. 33% (15) of those who work in Nursing Homes held contracts of 1-2 years in duration.
- **70% (235) of respondent migrant nurses work at staff nurse/midwife grade,** with 20% (67) working at senior staff level and 7% (25) working as nurse/midwife managers.
- **80% (271) of respondents were Dublin-based.**

Conclusions

1. The picture to emerge from this profile of respondent migrant nurses is of a largely female population with an average age of 38, the majority of whom are married and/or have children. Even this basic profile challenges the commonly held perception of the migrant nurse as a young, single individual with few family ties. The findings support qualitative findings from the Nurse Migration Project [7] which found that although respondents were largely satisfied with life in Ireland, they desired more stability via improved residency and naturalisation policies. Only 7% (23) of survey respondents had become Irish citizens although 42% (143) have been in Ireland since 2000/2.
2. In Ireland, as in many other countries, '*reliable and relevant data upon which good workforce policy depends are simply unavailable*' [8]. Although non-EU migrant nurses accounted for 40% of new entrants to the Irish Nursing Register between 2000 and 2008, almost nothing is known about this essential component of the workforce. In order to effectively plan Ireland's nursing workforce, comprehensive and regular information on migrant nurses are required. The Nurse Migration Project continues to demonstrate the potential for research and/or improved data collection to provide the type of information which might contribute to workforce planning in Ireland.

Acknowledgements

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For More Information

The Nurse Migration Project is a HRB funded project (2006 to 2009) which involves both qualitative and quantitative surveys of migrant nurses. It is led by Dr. Niamh Humphries, Professor Ruairí Brugh, and Professor Hannah McGee, Division of Population Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Further information available from Dr. Humphries: nhumphries@rcsi.ie or at <http://tinyurl.com/NiamhHumphries>. Further research updates will be released and disseminated in future Policy Briefs.

